

Male Body Image: The Construction of the Perfect Body in the Twentieth Century

Early Twentieth Century Masculinity

There was a growing emphasis in the Twenties to ensure that young boys were able to show “physical strength and dominance”

The ideals that society placed on young men during this time period, would come to shape how men think of their bodies.

As a result, the way in which men pursued exercise became different, these ideals led to the idea that “looking good” was more important than physical health.

The Seventies and *Pumping Iron*

The Seventies saw a rejuvenation of interest in the perfecting of the male body.

In the documentary *Pumping Iron*, Arnold Schwarzenegger comments on how he wants to ensure that “everything is perfect” in regards to his body.

Schwarzenegger also states that bodybuilding is a way of “judging the body by muscularity and proportion”

Male Body Image in Canadian Context

Reid Schindle was the winner of the 1979 Mr. Canada competition.

In an article in Maclean's, Schindle comments on how when he was a child he admired a man with a "chest that was absolutely massive".

The article also emphasizes the "reward" of having measurements similar to Schindle.

The Fitness Surge of the Eighties

In a CBC television broadcast, Peter Mansbridge comments on how “business at health clubs has never been more robust”

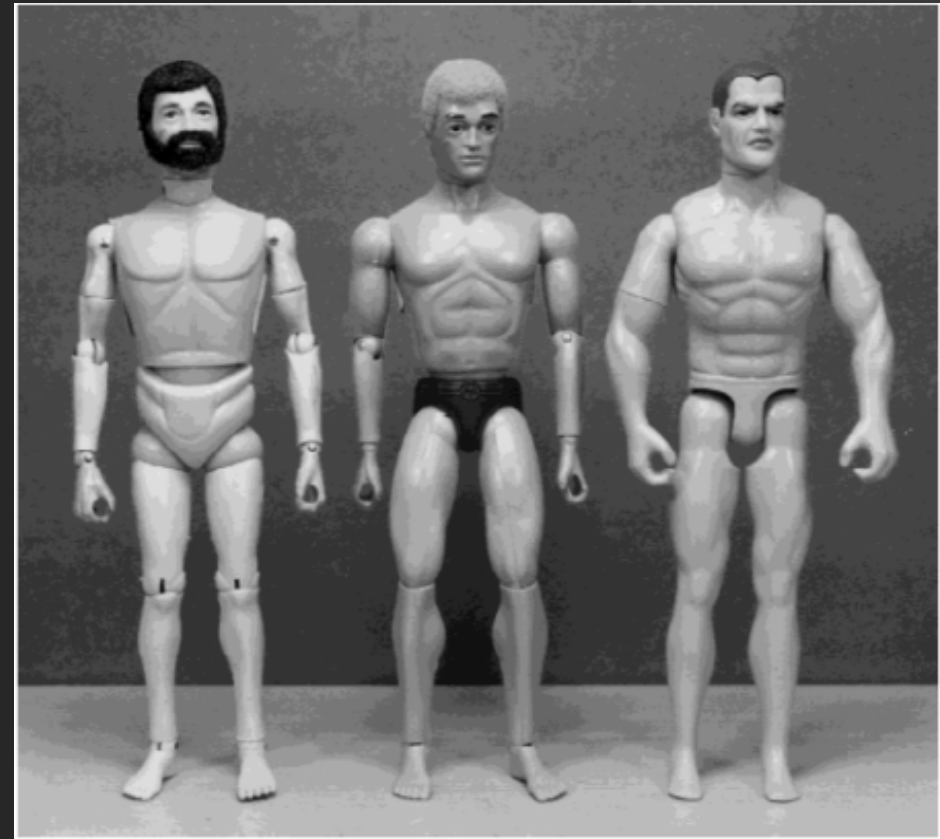
Furthermore, during the eighties “95%” of college age men were dissatisfied with “some aspect of their bodies”.

As a result, many young men looked toward the body ideal defined as “*muscular mesomorphic*”

This body type can be defined as having “well-developed chest and arm muscles” as well as a “narrow waist”.

Renewed Interest in Research in the Nineties

- The nineties led to “a growing body of literature” that served to describe “disorders of body image among men”.
- Society started to pay attention to the obsession that many men had with their body image.
- Studies show that body ideal obsessions, led to men ignoring “important social and family relationships”.
- Another study during the nineties revealed that many young boys were exposed to “muscular ideals” through their action figures.



Differences In Body Image Between Men and Women

Since the field of male body image is relatively new, it is important to look at how women have dealt with body image issues.

While male covet muscular bodies, many women are more concerned with having an “ultraslender body”.

In general, women exercise “more for weight control reasons than men”.

Similarities Between the Sexes

While men and women may have different goals, they are similar in the fact that “80% in each group reported a desire to change their current weight”.

Another commonality is that when men and women are insecure about their body image it can lead to “sexual difficulties or avoidance of social situations”.

Finally, Michael A. Friedman et al found that, “marital discord is significantly related to body image disturbance”.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, men are still struggling with how they look.

In a more modern article published in 2010, Ellexis Boyle talks about the “masculine physical perfection” that Arnold and others represent.

However, current society is much more aware of these issues than ever before.

This has led to more research into male body image, and as a result, maybe men can learn to focus more on their health, and less on societal body issues.

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